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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 14 - 20 OCTOBER 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) shelling and aerial bombardment continued in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) dominated Idleb enclave. Conflict also continued in the Tal Rifaat pocket. Meanwhile, widespread civilian demonstrations occurred in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in central and southern Syria continued, including a suicide bomb attack in Daraa Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | As Turkish-led incursions continued into northern Syria, the leadership of the Northeast Self-Administration reached a deal with the GoS, allowing GoS forces to secure key highways, various border locations, and Menbej District. At the same time, attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued in the Euphrates Valley, including a suicide bomb attack. Suspected Israeli airstrikes against sites near Abu Kamal also continued.

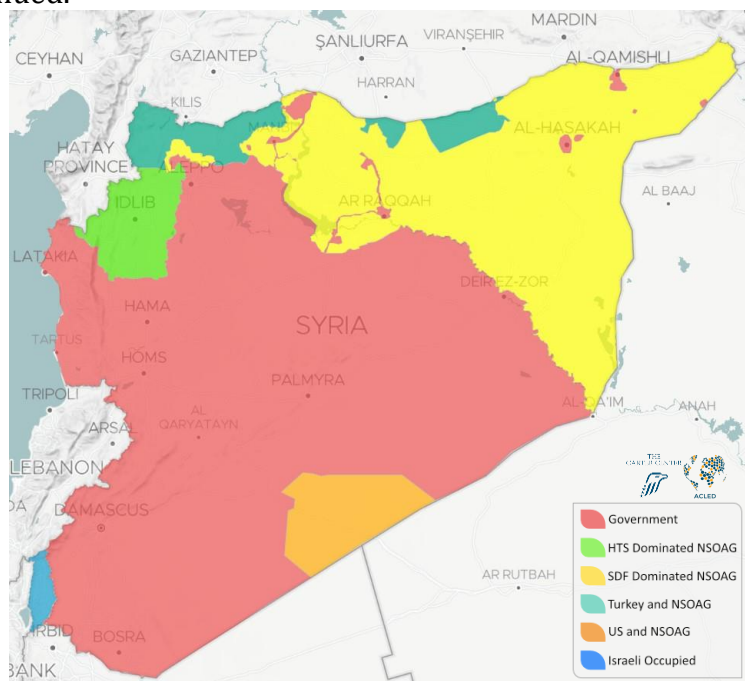


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 17 October 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Despite no changes in territorial control, Government of Syria (GoS) shelling and growing levels of aerial activity continued in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest (Figure 2). HTS and other opposition groups also shelled GoS-controlled areas around the Idlib enclave (Figure 3).

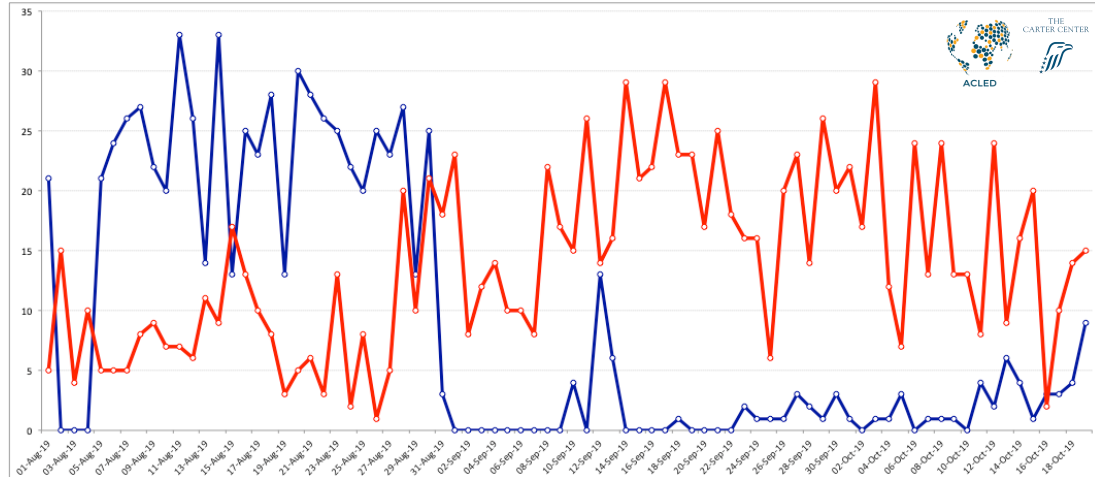


Figure 2: GoS-initiated aerial bombardment (Blue) and shelling (Red) in northwest Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

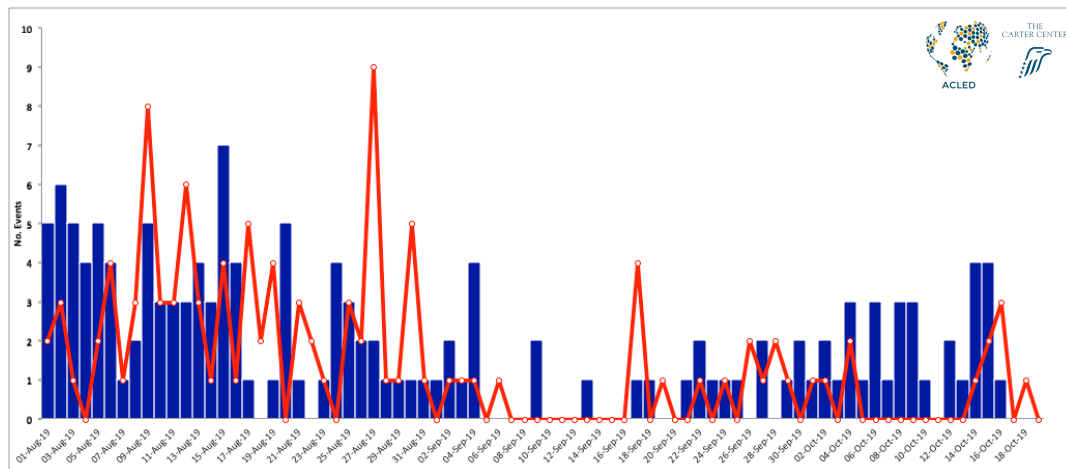


Figure 3: HTS and other armed groups shelling (blue) and armed clashes against (red) GoS areas in northwest Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Inside Idlib, there was internal conflict between opposition groups. In the Sharqi Neighborhood of Idlib City, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated near an HTS checkpoint, while in the town of Bennish, unidentified gunmen shot dead a local HTS-aligned council member. Additionally, on the Ghadqa and Masaran

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias maintain a presence in Syrian government-dominated territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish dominated, US backed SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under Syrian government control. The NSOAG labeled area along the border with Iraq and Jordan is a 55km de-confliction zone, established by the US-led coalition that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

road an unidentified group ambushed an Ahrar al Sham patrol.

For more information on internal conflict dynamics in the northwest of Syria, please see [“Internal Conflict in Northwest Syria”](#) on our website.

Further north, in the Tal Rifaat pocket, elevated levels of shelling and armed clashes continued after the previous period’s spike. At least 10 events were documented between the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish and aligned forces in Seftak, Zur Maghar, Tweis, the Basuta front, Azaz, the Maraanaz front, and the Hazwan front. The month of October has seen the highest number of incidents in any month during 2019.²

On 18 October, widespread civilian protests occurred in several locations in the northwest. In Maraath al Numaan, demonstrations denounced HTS rule. In Killi, Atmah, Idleb City, Al Bab, and Jarablus protests took place in support of Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring in northeast Syria. Protests have increased in the northwest during the past two months, despite HTS crackdowns on civil unrest and perceived dissent against the group.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

At least seven small arms fire attacks occurred in southern Syria this week, including targeting a National Defense Force (NDF) member in Saida nad in Jassim against a medical doctor who had been a member of a GoS reconciliation committee. In addition to these attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and former opposition members, a suicide bomb attack occurred in Jassim town this week. After an unidentified gunman shot dead a GoS official, a man detonated a suicide belt as local security forces were pursuing him. Four such suicide attacks have taken place in the past 12 months, but in eastern Daraa and As Sweida Governorates, as opposed to western areas of Daraa Governorate where Jassim is located.

Elsewhere in the south, low-level criminal activity was reported, with the murders of a local smuggler in Tafas and a drug dealer in Tal al Samn. In the latter case, ACLED reported that the individual was also a serving member of the GoS military in the area. Reported criminal activity in southern Syria is low, with levels likely under reported given the restrictive reporting environment in the country.

A protest also occurred in the Daraa Camp area of Daraa City on 15 October. Demonstrators called for the release of political detainees, a long-standing grievance from people in southern Syria since it was taken over by GoS forces in August 2018. It is only the fifth protest in the city since then.

Enduring ISIS activity continued in central areas of the country with the group ambushing a joint 11th Division, 5th Corps and Quds Brigade patrol in Bujayb Village near Sokhneh. Later in the week, an ISIS planted IED detonated impacting an Iranian Republican Guard Corps vehicle near Mayadin town. Pro-government media also [reported](#) that ISIS ambushed a GoS military patrol on the Sokhneh –

² 51 events compared to the monthly average of 2019 of 25 events.

Deir Ez Zor highway on 14 October.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Further changes in territorial control occurred during this reporting period after the start of “Operation Peace Spring” in northeast Syria the previous week.³ Turkish and allied Syrian opposition forces widened their control in areas extending between Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad and southwards to the M4 highway. Intense Turkish aerial and ground bombardments accompanied this advance and continued across the northeast until 17 October, when a 5-day ceasefire was [agreed](#) between Turkey and the US.

However, sporadic clashes and shelling continued in 15 areas⁴ after the start of the ceasefire, including in Bab al Kheir village, where Turkish-backed armed groups made brief advances on 18 October before being forced back to their original position by the SDF. The ceasefire is set to expire on 22 October.

GoS forces entered various locations in the northeast to create a buffer against Turkish expansion. After a [deal](#) between the SDF and GoS was reached on 14 October, GoS forces secured key highways between major cities in the northeast, various border points with Iraq and Turkey, and entered Menbej district.⁵ The GoS move coincided with a large-scale [withdrawal](#) of US troops from northeast Syria, triggering other coalition partners, including the French, to also reduce their presence in the area.

For a second consecutive week, reports of summary executions by Turkish backed Syrian opposition armed groups took place in the northeast. On 19 October, the opposition’s Syrian National Army members executed four people in Sukuk town for alleged YPG links. Social [media](#) posts also showed several summary executions or torture of alleged SDF or YPG members in the past week.

Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups also looted homes and conducted extortion arrest operations against civilians in newly captured areas. In Tal Abiad and Ras al Ain towns, the Hamza Division detained several civilians and, in one case, demanded nearly \$20,000 USD to secure the release of an elderly man. Such activity has been common in the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate.⁶

Further population displacements were reported as a result of the Turkish

³ Operation Peace Spring is a Turkish led invasion to take border areas in northeast Syria that is also backed by the opposition’s “Syrian National Army”. The Syrian National Army is a newly established Turkish-backed Syrian armed group made up of the National Liberation Front and Syria National Army, two of the largest armed opposition factions in the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate (Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch). It is under the command of the opposition’s Syrian Interim Government (SIG) when it formed in early October.

⁴ Abu Kabirah, Abu Rasayn, Hajji Hesso, north of Tal Tamr, Madhba’a, Markis, Mubarak, Qabr Sheikh Hassan, Ras al Ain, Shakariyeh, Um Adash, Um Al Ahras, Um al Asafir and Um Ashba.

⁵ Including Tabqa, Raqqqa, Ain Issa, Tal Tamr, Tal Hamis, Hassakeh and Qamishli towns. The Yarabia, Kobani border crossings as well as a limited area east to Qamlishli city were also taken.

⁶ In Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch areas. Extortion operations in these areas have been previously reported [here](#).

invasion between 14 and 20 October. Kurdish authorities estimated the displacement of up to 275,000 people since the beginning of Operation Peace Spring. UNOCHA [estimates](#) that 160,000 people had been displaced. The UN and Médecins Sans Frontières evacuated all their staff from northeast Syria.

Instability continued in camps holding women and children associated with ISIS. In Al Hol camp, SDF guards arrested several women inside the camp for causing unrest. In Ein Issa camp, camp residents set fire to their tents, also armed clashes were reported on 14 October.⁷ These are the first armed clashes reported in Ein Issa camp and follow similar attacks in Al Hol camp in the past month, as previously reported on [here](#).

Widespread demonstrations took place in Tabqa, Ashara, Baghuz, Asbah Hessen, Jdid Ekeidat and Shiheil, denouncing the arrival of GoS forces in the northeast and growing Iranian influence in the region. With the exception of Tabqa, these towns have been the site of previous anti-GoS and anti-Iranian protests during 2019.

Low-level attacks also continued against SDF and aligned personnel in the northeast. In the vicinity of Hasakeh City, two IEDs targeted SDF patrols in Ajaja and Jisr al Attala villages. In Shiheil and Hawayij Thiban, suspected ISIS members shot dead a local mayor and SDF member. An ISIS suicide car bomb also detonated at an SDF checkpoint in Hawayij. It is the first recorded suicide attack in the town since it was taken over by SDF forces in 2018, but still within an area that has typically seen such attacks in the past year (Figure 4).

⁷ Al-Hol and Ain Issa camps hold Syrian and foreign women and children who are associated with ISIS. These camps are guarded by the SDF.

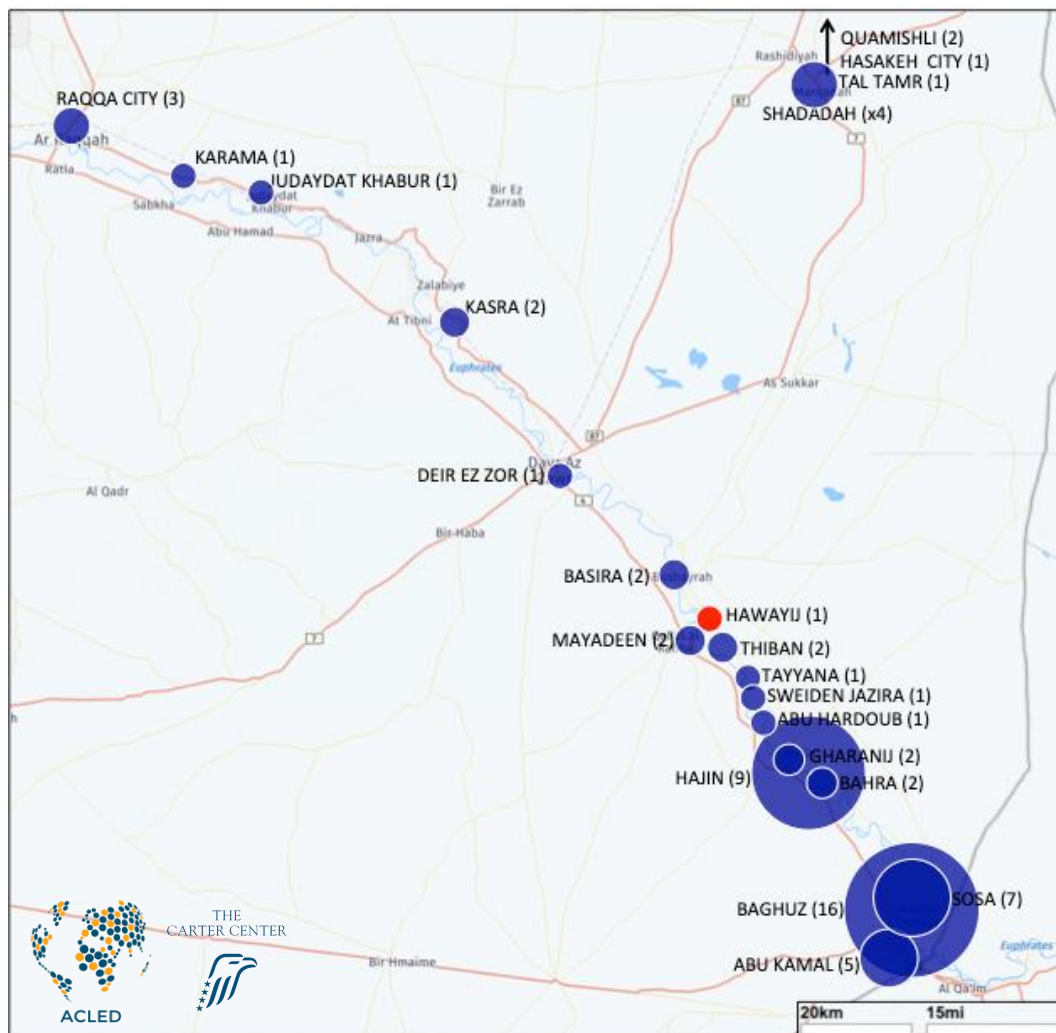


Figure 4: ISIS Suicide attacks in the Euphrates River Valley in 2018 and 2019, with this week's attack highlighted in red. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Finally, for the sixth consecutive week, suspected Israeli airstrikes struck two Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) sites near Abu Kamal. On 15 October, strikes impacted sites in the Green Belt and Sikhah areas. It is the seventh time the area has been struck by airstrikes since 3 September.⁸

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⁸ After strikes on 3, 8, 18, 28, 30 September and 11 October.